Protecting Drinking Water Supplies in the Midwest:

EPA Leads Cleanup of a Small-Town Superfund Site

Contaminated soil being removed from the site

Ace Services

The Ace Services Superfund Site in Colby, Kansas is on its way to becoming a viable property once more. The 2.5-acre site of a former chrome-plating facility that sits in the midst of this small town has been underused for more than 10 years, suffering from chromium contamination that threatened the local drinking water supply. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is now working with the state to clean up the property and groundwater to protect residents of Colby, and to help return this underused property to productive use.

Ace Services Site

From 1969 to 1989, Ace Services operated a facility that applied chrome plating to farm implement parts in Colby, a town of just over 6,500 residents. For the first six years of the plant's operation, chromium-contaminated wastewater was discharged on to the ground near a tributary that feeds Prairie Dog Creek. Ace Services later built concrete retention vats and an evaporation lagoon to hold the wastewater; however, the unlined lagoon allowed the wastewater to seep into the soil and groundwater underneath, affecting the Ogallala Aquifer, the town's sole source of drinking water. One of Colby's eight public water supply wells that feeds from the aquifer was closed in 1980 after the discovery of chromium contamination. Each of the town's other seven wells is located within a four-mile radius of the former chrome-plating facility, but none is in the path of the contamination. Several private wells are in the plume's path, however, and some have already been contaminated; EPA and the State are helping these residents by hooking them up to the municipal water supply to ensure they have clean drinking water.

EPA Cleanup Actions

To assess contamination levels and begin cleanup at the Ace Services site, the Kansas Department of Health and the Environment (KDHE) and EPA removed contaminated soil and other wastes from the property and installed several groundwater monitoring wells. The monitoring wells revealed that the Ogallala Aquifer's groundwater was indeed contaminated with chromium. EPA subsequently developed a cleanup plan for the area that includes the construction of an extraction well and piping system and a groundwater treatment plant. The Agency also recently removed an additional 1,000 tons of contaminated soil and contaminated debris from the site.

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JUST THE FACTS:

- In 2002, nearly $6 million has been allocated for the cleanup of the 2.5-acre Ace Services site and groundwater contamination caused by the site in the town of Colby.
- EPA will release additional funding this year to complete construction of an extraction well and piping system and a groundwater treatment plant.
- EPA recently removed 1,000 tons of contaminated soil and debris from the site.

EPA and the State are providing water connections to replace contaminated private wells with city water to protect the health of residents and the environment throughout the 13-year cleanup effort.

EPA has allocated nearly $6 million in the past year to clean up the Ace Services Site, and has already spent more than $2.2 million in total to demolish buildings on the site, remove and dispose of contaminated soil, begin construction of the groundwater treatment plant, and install the extraction well and piping system. The Agency will release additional funding this year to complete construction of the plant.

EPA Supports Community Needs

EPA has taken action to inform and seek input from the citizens of Colby throughout EPA's and KDHE's efforts to address the area's contamination. In addition to interviewing community members to determine their primary concerns about the site, EPA Region 7 and KDHE held two public meetings to answer questions and hear comments on proposed cleanup actions. EPA and KDHE keep residents updated through fact sheets and media briefings, and EPA officials are available to the public through an 800-number. In working with residents, EPA found that the community's primary concerns centered around conserving and cleaning up the groundwater and the potential for economic development at the Ace Site. Community leaders see potential for the property; however, the overriding concern remains the town's water quality.

Although it will be some time before redevelopment can take place at the site—groundwater treatment is expected to continue for about 13 years—local subcontractors are providing cleanup services valued at $1.5 million. EPA estimates that workers on the project will expend $300,000–$400,000 on meals and lodging in Colby over the life of the cleanup; this money represents a significant infusion of cash into Colby's economy. Additionally, EPA plans to establish a cooperative agreement with Colby, whereby the town will be paid to operate the treatment system for EPA—another benefit to the area's economy.

Although cleanup of Colby's water supply will take several years, EPA will continue to work with the town and its residents to ensure they remain safe and enjoy clean water and new economic prospects in their midst.

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Preparing to build the groundwater treatment plant.